

What Is a Vertical Team?

Most commonly a vertical team consists of middle school and high school educators who teach in the same academic area. It may also include elementary teachers, school counselors, administrators, department chairs, or curriculum specialists. Through communication and cooperation, teams design curricular change and create support structures necessary to make high achievement by all students a reality.

Purpose of a Vertical Team

In vertical teams, teachers from different grade levels work together to develop a continuum of knowledge and skills that build from one grade level to the next. Team communication leads to a greater understanding of what is taught each year, which helps teachers organize strategies, plan introduction of concepts, and reduce repetition of content. As a result, student achievement and success is enhanced.

Goals of a Vertical Team

- Increase achievement for all students to close the achievement gap.
- To bring about coordination and communication between grade levels
- To foster greater inclusion and build enrollment in advanced coursework
- To introduce skills, concepts, and assessment methods to prepare students for success in advanced coursework
- To encourage innovation
- To stimulate enthusiasm for advanced coursework in the school, family, and community

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Vertical Teams

Designing Curriculum for Student Success

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
ELIZABETH BURMASTER, STATE SUPERINTENDENT

The **vertical team** concept is based on a philosophy of **access**.



Benefits for Teachers

Through a successful vertical curriculum team, teachers will:

- Be confident that students enter courses with the knowledge and skills to be successful
- Understand how what they teach fits into a student's learning continuum
- Eliminate redundant topics, providing the opportunity for more in-depth focus and/or investigation of additional topics
- Enhance their knowledge of subject area curriculum and add to their repertoire of instructional strategies and assessment techniques

Benefits for Students

A successful vertical team will:

- Prepare students for the next level of challenge by developing skills and strategies necessary for success in advanced coursework
- Promote greater inclusion and progress towards closing the achievement gap
- Improve student achievement

Developing and Sustaining a Vertical Team

There are seven steps in establishing a vertical team:

1. Raise awareness and understanding of advanced curriculum opportunities within the school.
2. Work with administrators to provide support for a vertical team.
3. Organize a group of interested educators and select a leader.
4. Create and implement a curricular reform action plan.
5. Cultivate important team-building and leadership skills.
6. Develop community-wide support.
7. Assess the effectiveness of the vertical team.

Typical Vertical Team Activities

There are no prescribed activities for a vertical team, but the following are some that are commonly used:

- Create a flow chart of all the subject courses offered in middle school and high school
- Share what each teacher expects students to know, understand, and be able to do upon entering each course
- Discuss state standards, benchmarks, and frameworks
- Identify successful teaching strategies
- Design assessment options
- Identify student misconceptions

What is the Connection to Advanced Coursework?

Advanced curriculum opportunities can be offered through vehicles such as Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate courses, Youth Options and honors courses. Students who are successful have acquired concepts, skills, and strategies which allow them to engage in rigorous levels of learning. These tools are not developed in a single, isolated course, but rather are cultivated over a period of several years. Vertical teams design a coherent sequence of learning that builds with increasing depth and complexity on core concepts and skills from middle school through high school to increase achievement and success for all students.

Equity and Access

The concept of vertical teams is based on a philosophy of inclusion, on the notion that all students benefit from experiencing a rich and rigorous curriculum. Research shows that students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged students tend to be under-represented in advanced coursework. The goal of vertical teams is to prepare all students for success in rigorous courses at the secondary level, not only certain groups. This results in an organizational pipeline that promotes equity and access for all.